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Recognizing the growing interest in the psychological approaches to biographical studies, this thesis undertakes to examine the life of General William Tecumseh Sherman with an emphasis on its psychological components. An examination of his personal correspondence as well as a study of the recorded observations of his contemporaries provide clues which suggest tentative judgments concerning the enigmatic nature of his personality.

Sherman's famous campaigns of destruction during the American Civil War have received both praise and condemnation. Yet, no less a polarity of response is found within the man himself. His early childhood was characterized by extreme docility and submission to the authority of his foster parents. Sherman's youth and early adulthood showed signs of sensitivity and insecurity. His early military career, beginning at West Point in 1836 and ending in California in 1854, was unrewarding. His repeated attempts at civilian careers after his resignation from the army were marked by failure and frustration. Sherman's re-enlistment in the United States Army following the outbreak of the Civil War marked the beginning of the career in which he would achieve his fame as an American military hero. Following an unsteady, if not personally

tragic, early experience in the War, General Sherman's behavior as the Conflict drew to a close presented a dramatic record of success and a new self-confidence. Conviction, vigor, and self-assuredness replaced the insecurities of his earlier years. In the closing decades of his life, Sherman's behavior manifested a fusion of the variety of forces which had plagued his life-time search for personal equilibrium.

The conclusions in this thesis are tentative, limited by the difficulties of determining the motives of a man long since dead and the awareness of a personal lack of professional training in psychoanalysis. The aim of the thesis, however, is to redirect attention to a figure in American history whose actions have been variously judged but imperfectly understood.

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THE PRIVATE WAR OF GENERAL SHERMAN

This thesis has been approved by the following  
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

by

Janet Brenner Franzoni  
///

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
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in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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## PREFACE

"Masterful" and "bold" have appeared concurrently with "diabolic" and "sadistic" in judgments made upon William Tecumseh Sherman's famous marches during the American Civil War. His concept of total war has met with both praise and condemnation.

He has been hailed as a hero:

. . . we hereby record the high appreciation in which the American people hold the character and services of General Sherman, as one of the greatest soldiers of his generation, as one of the grandest patriots that our country has produced, and as a noble man in the broadest and fullest meaning of the word.<sup>1</sup>

He has been deplored as a demon:

. . . . It would seem as if in him all the attributes of man were merged in the enormities of the demon, as if Heaven intended in him to manifest depths of depravity yet untouched by a fallen race . . . .<sup>2</sup>

Yet the polarity of response which the Sherman name evokes is no less extreme than the opposing forces within the man himself. Consider the following correspondence:

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<sup>1</sup>"Resolution of the House of Representatives," Feb. 14, 1891, quoted in John Sherman, Recollections (New York, 1895), II, 1104.

<sup>2</sup>Macon Telegraph, Dec. 5, 1864, quoted in Lloyd Lewis, Sherman: Fighting Prophet (New York, 1932), p. 435.

April 15, 1859:

I am doomed to be a vagabond, and shall no longer struggle against my fate. . . . I look on myself as a dead cock in the pit, not worthy of further notice.<sup>3</sup>

May 13, 1861:

It may be I am but a chip on the whirling tide of time destined to be cast on the shore as a worthless weed.<sup>4</sup>

January 5, 1865:

I do think that in the several grand epochs of this war, my name will have a prominent part.<sup>5</sup>

January 17, 1866:

I get a great many commentaries on the past, and have no reason to object to the exalted examples with which my name is connected. According to some enthusiasts Hannibal, Alexander, and Napoleon fall below my standard.<sup>6</sup>

It is the intention of this study to explore the enigmatic personality of William Tecumseh Sherman for possible clues to the psychological components of his life. The method of research includes an examination of his personal correspondence as well as the recorded observations of his contemporaries. Recognizing the difficulties inherent

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<sup>3</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, in M. A. DeWolfe Howe, ed., Home Letters of General Sherman (New York, 1909), p. 159.

<sup>4</sup>W. T. Sherman to David Boyd, in Walter L. Fleming, ed., General W. T. Sherman as College President (Cleveland, 1912), p. 381.

<sup>5</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, in Howe, ed., op. cit., p. 324.

<sup>6</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, in Rachel Sherman Thorndike, ed., The Sherman Letters (London, 1894), p. 261.

in attempting to analyze a man who is no longer living as well as the limitations presented by a personal lack of professional psychoanalytic training, this study will aim simply to suggest tentative conclusions on the basis of such analyses as an amateur can bring to the task.

This study has emanated from a recent growing interest among historians in psychological biography. As early as 1931 Edgar Lee Masters professed to present an examination of Lincoln's mind and nature rather than a chronological narrative of his life in his Lincoln, the Man (New York, 1931). Included among subsequent psychological biographies are Erik H. Erikson, Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History (New York, 1958); David H. Donald, Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War (New York, 1960); and Sigmund Freud and William C. Bullitt, Thomas Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study (Boston, 1967).

It is hoped that this thesis will renew interest in the personality of the controversial figure of General Sherman in its attempt to understand, rather than to judge, his behavior.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Psychiatrists agree that feelings of security are rooted deeply in the early years of life. Deprivation of the fundamental needs for affection and security generate anxieties which manifest themselves as the individual matures. Often adult neuroses and maladjustment can be traced to disruptive childhood experiences.<sup>1</sup>

William Tecumseh Sherman's childhood experiences were scarcely ideal. Born in Lancaster, Ohio, on February 8, 1820, the boy was named "Tecumseh" after the great chief of the Shawnees whom his father admired. Nicknamed "Cump" almost immediately by his family, the child was the sixth of eleven offspring to be born of Mary and Charles Sherman.<sup>2</sup>

When "Cump" was nine years old, tragedy befell the family. The Sherman children were summoned from school

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<sup>1</sup>See Karen Horney, The Neurotic Personality of Our Time (New York, 1937), pp. 41-59, 79-101, 115-34; Barney Katz and Louis P. Thorpe, Understanding People in Distress (New York, 1955), pp. 3-24, 42-59; Eric Pfeiffer, Disordered Behavior (New York, 1968), pp. 6-7, 89-100; and Carl R. Rogers, "A Theory of Personality," In Theodore Millon, ed., Theories of Psychopathology (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 262-69.

<sup>2</sup>Factual information in the life of William Tecumseh Sherman can be verified in the following biographies: B. H. Liddell Hart, Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American (New York,

one day to be informed that their father, a circuit judge, was mortally ill in Lebanon, Ohio, where he had travelled to attend a court session. Mary Sherman failed to reach her husband in his final hours, and the news of his death reduced her to a state of collapse. Distressed by the sudden loss of their father and the resulting prostration of their mother, the children directed their attention to such contributions as they could make toward ameliorating the tragedy. The boys spent many hours during that mournful week devising resolves for "helping mother."<sup>3</sup>

It was "Cump", however, who served first to ease the family's burden, although not as a result of any of the brothers' plans. A devoted friend, neighbor, and indebted colleague of Judge Sherman, Thomas Ewing, offered to rear one of the Sherman boys in his family. He requested "the brightest of the lot," whereupon the decision was made that Tecumseh would leave the Sherman household and thereafter make his home with the Ewing family. In his biography of Sherman, Lloyd Lewis describes Tecumseh's being called in from play, told of the decision, and directed to collect his belongings and depart "up the street" with Thomas Ewing.

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1929); Lloyd Lewis, Sherman: Fighting Prophet (New York, 1932); W. Fletcher Johnson, Life of William Tecumseh Sherman (n.p., 1891); and Edward Robins, William T. Sherman (Philadelphia, 1905). Hereinafter, common biographical information will not receive footnote citation.

<sup>3</sup>See John Sherman, Recollections, p. 28. See also William Tecumseh Sherman, Memoirs (New York, 1904), I, 13.

Lewis reports:

For Cump the transfer was managed so deftly that it was, in his mind little more than the switching of beds from one house to another.<sup>4</sup>

This judgment appears to oversimplify an event, which, psychologically, can have far-reaching effects on a child's basic feelings of security. Having so recently suffered the loss of his revered father, Cump was now confronted with the surrender of his own position in the Sherman family unit. Indeed, even at this tender age he must have wondered why his mother chose so readily to release him from her brood. The Ewing family, out of respect for the Sherman name, decided against his legal adoption,<sup>5</sup> which, although nobly intended, would hardly promote the boy's full incorporation into the new group. Biographers tend to agree that throughout his boyhood Tecumseh was unsure whether to consider himself a Sherman or a Ewing.

Although the Ewings chose not to adopt the Sherman child, Mrs. Ewing requested that he be baptized Roman Catholic, the Church of her preference, and Mrs. Sherman acquiesced. It was at that time that the boy received the name William. A witness to the ceremony recalled that the priest, following the usual Catholic practice, required the boy to have a saint's name, suggesting "William" in honor

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<sup>4</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

of the day, June 28, the feast of St. William.<sup>6</sup> Indicative, perhaps, of his confusion of identity is the fact that Sherman would record in his Memoirs fifty years hence, "My father named me William Tecumseh Sherman."<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting to observe young Sherman's maturation in the light of psychological studies dealing with insecurity that emanates from ambivalent feelings about acceptance and rejection in childhood. Generally, studies find two types of response to such misgivings: a submissive, reticent attitude accompanied by feelings of unworthiness and over-sensitivity; or an aggressive, vengeful attitude characterized by overt manifestations of hostility. Occasionally, one individual may exhibit both elements of response in the course of his lifetime, depending upon the circumstances he encounters.<sup>8</sup>

There were traces of both reactions in the life of William Tecumseh Sherman. Extreme docility, over-sensitivity, and feelings of unworthiness seem to have characterized his

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<sup>6</sup>See "Ellie Brown's Reminiscences," Thomas Ewing Family Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

<sup>7</sup>W. T. Sherman, Memoirs, I, 11.

<sup>8</sup>See Erik H. Erikson, "Growth and Crises," in Millon, ed., Theories of Psychopathology, pp. 174-97; Pfeiffer, Disordered Behavior, pp. 96-101; Horney, Neurotic Personality, pp. 79-100, 135-46; and Katz and Thorpe, People in Distress, pp. 42-59, 87-101.

early life. Vengeance, aggression, and hostility appear to have dominated the years when he was at the height of his military career. This study will observe the fluctuations of Sherman's personality as he encountered the exigencies of life.



## II. GROWING PAINS

Throughout his youth, "Cump" Sherman played with his brothers and foster brothers interchangeably since both families lived in the same neighborhood. He remarked on several occasions that he considered the Ewing children as his own brothers and sisters, and recalled that Thomas Ewing always treated him "as his own son."<sup>1</sup> Yet, periodic correspondence between Ewing and his wife hinted of an apprehension about the boy's adjustment in their family. On December 9, 1831, Ewing wrote his wife:

And there is Cumpy too--he is disposed to be bashful, not quite at home. Endeavor to inspire him with confidence and make him feel one of the family.<sup>2</sup>

And two years later, Ewing wrote his wife requesting the presence of his own son, Philemon, in Washington:

. . . try and prevent Cumpy getting the idea that he is less beloved by me.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of Ewing's earnestness, however, Sherman's own correspondence occasionally evidenced uneasiness regarding his foster parents' concern for him. In 1839 he revealed

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<sup>1</sup>W. T. Sherman, Memoirs, I, 14.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 44. Philemon was only eleven months older than "Cump" and was thus his closest rival for familial affection.



to Ellen Ewing:

You certainly misunderstood me with regard to your mother. Although I should feel highly honored did she condescend to notice me, still, I am fully aware how slight are my claims to her regard . . . .<sup>4</sup>

As late as 1857 Sherman was expressing similar ideas to Thomas Ewing:

Mrs. Ewing mentions in one of her letters that you were disappointed in not hearing from me. . . . I did not think you cared about hearing from me unless I had something specific to write about.<sup>5</sup>

Under the guardianship of the Ewings, the youthful Sherman's behavior showed respect for the authority of his foster-parents. The boy was obedient and docile. John Sherman described his brother during his youth as "quiet in his manners and easily moved by sympathy or affection."<sup>6</sup> It can only be conjectured, of course, that Sherman's extraordinary reticence might have been prompted by a fear of rejection, but the evidence does seem to invite that inference.

Over-sensitivity to criticism during his teen-age years prompted a bizarre reaction to playful remarks concerning his red hair. Expecting to end the unpleasant teasings, the young boy attempted to change his hair color

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<sup>4</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, August 21, 1839, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, January 3, 1857, ibid., p. 145.

<sup>6</sup>John Sherman, Recollections, I, 32.

by using a variety of concoctions. His endeavors only increased his anxieties, however, for on one occasion the experiments changed his hair color to a startling green.<sup>7</sup>

Harboring doubts about his security, the young lad was to face another major adjustment in the pattern of his life in 1836. In that year, Thomas Ewing, then a United States Senator, obtained for his charge an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Apparently, he gave the boy little option for refusing the offer.

Liddell Hart's biography explains:

At fourteen, however, he was notified to prepare for West Point--a euphemistic way of saying that he was not consulted in regard to a decision and a destination which sounded ominous to the ears of a boy brought up in the freedom and 'naturalness' of Ohio in the thirties.<sup>8</sup>

The cramped, unattractive, and sparsely furnished barracks and the unimaginative meals served at the Academy hardly strengthened an already tenuous sense of well-being. Letters to his foster-sister Ellen Ewing during this period revealed a sad sensitivity. In May, 1839, he wrote:

I have almost despaired of ever receiving that long wished for and expected letter from your mother. I presume, however, she is too busily engaged to write.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 36. "Ellie Brown's Reminiscences", Ewing Family Papers, also refers to this occasion.

<sup>8</sup>P. 4.

<sup>9</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, May 4, 1839, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 8.

In August of that same year he reflected:

. . . . Very often I feel my insignificance and inability to repay the many kindnesses and favors received at her hands and those of her family.<sup>10</sup>

Dependence upon the Ewings seemed to bother the young cadet. His first year at West Point necessitated his requesting a small amount of money from Mrs. Ewing in order to buy some winter accessories. The tone of the request was solicitous:

You may think it strange that I should ask for money but in reality I would be the last person that would ask it unless it were absolutely necessary.<sup>11</sup>

By 1839 he would avoid the unpleasantness entirely, choosing instead, to borrow a small sum from his own mother. On September 3, he wrote to Mrs. Sherman:

I am compelled to ask a small favor of you which I will repay . . . that is, that you will lend me \$5.00. . . . I do not wish ever to ask Mr. Ewing again for assistance.<sup>12</sup>

Considering the Ewings' more favorable financial position at this time, the request would seem to indicate a desire to be released from his "foster-state".

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<sup>10</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, August 21, 1839, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>W. T. Sherman to Mrs. Ewing, October 15, 1836, Ewing Family Papers.

<sup>12</sup>W. T. Sherman to Mrs. Sherman, September 3, 1839, W. T. Sherman Papers, I, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Army life at West Point failed to excite Cadet Sherman. Indeed, he was often bored with the routine and discipline of Academy regulations. He received neither awards nor promotions throughout his entire four years, indicating, perhaps, that the Academy was likewise unimpressed with Sherman. Prior to his graduation from West Point he told his brother John that he doubted that he would remain in the army for life.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, in spite of its irritations, it seemed as though the army would provide Sherman with a certain measure of security. Withdrawal from military service became less likely as his career developed, and periodic promotions seemed to satisfy his need for recognition.<sup>14</sup> By 1842 his preference for army life was affirmed. He wrote Ellen Ewing in reply to her queries concerning his future:

But why don't I leave the Army? you ask. Why should I? It is the profession for which my education alone fits me. . . . Moreover, I am content and happy, and it would be foolish to spring into the world barehanded and unprepared to meet its coldness and trials. . . .<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, March 7, 1840, in Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Note the element of pride in his accomplishment expressed to John in a letter of February 15, 1842: "You doubtless saw my promotion announced in 'Orders'. I have been exceedingly fortunate, attaining a rank which generally requires five or eight years' service in the short period of seventeen months." Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, April 7, 1842, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 20.

One wonders what "coldness" and "trials" Sherman anticipated, or how "barehanded" and "unprepared" to meet them was a single, healthy, twenty-two-year-old man.

Two years later, Sherman's correspondence repeated his dependency on the army. From Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, he wrote Ellen in 1844 discussing her father's suggestions that he prepare for civil life:

Now I thought he had long since relinquished that idea. . . . He knows my perfect dependence, and that were I to resign, I would have to depend upon some one till I could establish myself in the practice of some profession. Do you think I could do so? Certainly not. . . . It would then be madness itself at this late day to commence something new.<sup>16</sup>

Again, the apprehension was disproportionate.

During his early army career, Sherman was a "loner". He often wrote about parties which he did not attend and social invitations which he declined. He admitted his reluctance to form friendships. In June, 1844, he wrote Ellen:

I do not want many friends . . . and therefore shall so guard my intercourse with the world as to become attached to none, save those with whom I may be associated in life for a long period.<sup>17</sup>

In this letter he admitted his preference for spending the summer studying a law text rather than securing friends

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<sup>16</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, February 8, 1844, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, June 14, 1844, ibid.



"temporary" and "changing". In thus conducting his life, might not Sherman be trying to avoid the risk of being hurt through the possible disruption of an intimate relationship?

Correspondence in the following year showed no change in social attitudes. In fact, mild withdrawal characterized some of his letters to Ellen. Typical was this description of a summer night in 1845:

. . . . It is truly a lovely night when one may sit for hours and enjoy undisturbed that gentle quiet and repose that resembles a life of dreams rather than actual existence in this rascally world.<sup>18</sup>

Lacking friends, Sherman reflected often on the importance of familial affection. He listened to a sermon at Fort Moultrie one Sunday, and was so impressed by its content, that he recalled the text almost verbatim in a letter to Ellen on January 31, 1846:

. . . . The text was, 'He came unto his own and his own received him not' . . . and the sermon opened with a very pretty peroration on family affection, how a person, however much he may have drawn upon himself the envy and malice of the world, whenever he turned to his own family would experience those endearing attentions that would make him forget the cares of life; but should they too reject him, how miserable would he be.<sup>19</sup>

How miserable, indeed.

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<sup>18</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, June 9, 1845, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, January 31, 1846, ibid., p. 32.



## III. CAREER QUEST

When war broke out with Mexico, Lieutenant Sherman expressed a desire to be sent to Texas for direct participation in the conflict.<sup>1</sup> Instead, he was dispatched to California for a three-year assignment involving routine administrative tasks with little opportunity for advancement. Unchallenged and unrewarded, Sherman's spirits began to sink. He envied the accomplishments of his old associates, most of whom had gained honors in the Mexican conflict. He considered himself in California "banished from fame."<sup>2</sup> His correspondence reflected despondency:

. . . . I am so completely banished that I feel I am losing all hope, all elasticity of spirits. I feel ten years older than I did when I sailed.<sup>3</sup>

The army had ceased to fulfill Sherman's needs. By August, 1848, he was seriously considering sending his resignation to Washington, but circumstances reversed the

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<sup>1</sup>See John Sherman, Recollections, I, 84.

<sup>2</sup>See W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, November 10, 1847, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 109: "To hear of war in Mexico and the brilliant deeds of the army, of my own regiment and my own old associates, everyone of whom has gained honors. . . ." In this letter he also spoke of the opportunity in Mexico "to gain personal and professional experience if not military fame."

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

inclination. General Persifor F. Smith arrived in California to assume command of the newly created Division of the Pacific, and convinced Sherman of his need for an adjutant-general who knew the country and its conditions.<sup>4</sup> The importance of his post re-defined, Sherman chose to remain in California.

In 1849 the Army ordered Sherman to the east coast as bearer of special dispatches to General Winfield Scott, providing an opportunity for visits with both his families--the Ewings and the Shermans. Shortly after these visits it was announced that a wedding would take place between William Tecumseh Sherman and Ellen Boyle Ewing.<sup>5</sup> Biographers concur that during the course of their long relationship, it was difficult to determine when the childhood devotion changed into a mature love. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the psychological implications of Sherman's choice for a marriage partner. The young William's correspondence had often indicated that he considered the Ewing children as his own brothers and sisters.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See Hart, Sherman, p. 27. Hart relates that Sherman actually had prepared his resignation, but General Smith, his new superior, vetoed it.

<sup>5</sup>The wedding took place May 1, 1850.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing, August 21, 1839, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 10: "Indeed, I often feel that your father and mother have usurped the place which nature has allotted to parents alone, and that their children those of brothers and sisters with regard to myself. . . ."

He was but nine years old when he had been taken into the Ewing family. Apart from the incestuous overtones of the relationship, it might simply be suggested that Sherman's approach to marriage was analogous to his attitude toward friendship. Fearing the transitory, he sought the enduring. Of Ellen Ewing's devotion there was no doubt.

In the fall of 1850 Sherman rented a home for his wife in St. Louis, the headquarters for his new assignment. After a two-year tour in St. Louis, he was transferred to New Orleans. Army post life in New Orleans rendered him discontent, however, because of the routine nature of his tasks. He recognized his own restlessness when he wrote:

Nothing but activity and continued interest contents me, and when these fail, an impulse moves me that reason, nor pleasure, nor any ordinary motive accounts for.<sup>7</sup>

How characteristic of the neurotic personality are such feelings. Involvement and continued activity often allay the symptoms of depression.<sup>8</sup>

Restless and discontent, Sherman at this time received an attractive offer to establish himself with a banking firm in California. He applied for and was granted a six-month leave of absence from the Army in order to

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<sup>7</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, November 26, 1852, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 133.

<sup>8</sup>See Horney, Neurotic Personality, p. 52; Pfeiffer, Disordered Behavior, pp. 110-112; and Joseph Wolpe, "Etiology of Human Neuroses," in Millon, ed., Theories of Psychopathology, pp. 366-75.

investigate the merits of the offer. After a sojourn in San Francisco, Sherman was convinced that the offer was genuine and held attractive possibilities for his family's financial welfare. Before accepting the offer, however, he found it necessary to write to Thomas Ewing begging his approval.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, the expressed desire for independence had not been achieved.

On September 6, 1853, Sherman resigned from the Army after a military career of seventeen years. Despite his previous misgivings, at the age of thirty-three he would "commence to start something new."<sup>10</sup> He was happy about the prospects of the California venture, and felt that he had attained the position on his own merits.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, the California opportunity failed to provide the anticipated felicities. Ellen was miserable, claiming often that the climate did not agree with her. Repeatedly, she entreated her husband to return east. Her

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<sup>9</sup>W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, August 22, 1853, Ewing Family Papers. Realizing Ellen's attachment to her father, Sherman wrote: " . . . I ask your free and hearty consent to ease the shock of Ellen's leaving home."

<sup>10</sup>See supra, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Apparently, Thomas Ewing had offered Sherman an alternate civic position in Ohio which Sherman declined. See W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, September 29, 1853, Ewing Family Papers: " . . . You will appreciate my position when I add that I would rather be at the head of the bank in San Francisco, a position attained by my own efforts, than to occupy any place open to me in Ohio."

complaints distressed Sherman, especially since he believed that the California atmosphere would be beneficial for her health as well as the children's.<sup>12</sup> Reluctantly, Sherman consented to send Ellen to Lancaster in the Spring of 1855 for an extended visit with her family, while he was left to care for their two youngest children.<sup>13</sup>

Sherman's disappointment with the California enterprise increased as economic conditions deteriorated. Added to the personal burden of his wife's adjustment was the task of maintaining the bank's solvency. A transfer to the branch in St. Louis seemed a sensible alternative. But again, fear of change superceded rationality. Consider this letter to Thomas Ewing written in April, 1856:

I am better known here than anywhere else. I have been so long identified with California that it would be foolish to change, so I look upon this as my home.<sup>14</sup>

The bank in San Francisco ultimately was forced to close, necessitating Sherman's removal from the West to manage the affairs of the New York branch of the same firm.

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<sup>12</sup>See W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, December 8, 1854, Ewing Family Papers: " . . . . This is notoriously the most vigorous climate for children . . . and though Ellen has her aches and pains she never looked better."

<sup>13</sup>For a heartwarming account of Sherman's role as mother-father to two young "handfuls" see Hart, Sherman, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup>W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, April 15, 1856, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 144.



Unfortunately, the New York enterprise yielded to economic pressures within three months, leaving Sherman displaced and unemployed. In his need he was forced to seek the aid of his father-in-law, a distasteful and humiliating experience.

This unfortunate turn of events was not entirely inevitable, however. Curiously, re-examination of Sherman's conduct of affairs in California indicates that a good measure of his personal financial losses might have been avoided. During his career in California he had accepted from his friends varying amounts of money for speculative investment. With the general financial failures of the period, these investments suffered a substantial decline. Sherman felt a personal responsibility for the losses, however, and endeavored to compensate with his personal funds, even though it meant his own financial liquidation. Lloyd Lewis considers this behavior a positive character trait, remarking:

By all the rules of banking Sherman would have been justified and have been expected to say to his friends: ' . . . . You asked me to speculate for you. I did the best I could, but could not foresee this panic.' But Sherman's blood was not cold enough for a banker's veins . . . . He assumed the responsibility for his friends' loss, even though it threatened to strip him of his last cent and cast him with his wife and four children upon the charity of his father-in-law.<sup>15</sup>

One cannot help but wonder whether his preferential concern for his friends' rather than his family's welfare might have

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<sup>15</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 96.



emanated from a fear of losing the former's respect, and ultimately, the friendship. Of his family's allegiance, he had assurance.

Sherman's sense of obligation toward his friends was soon matched by a feeling of responsibility toward his firm. At a great personal sacrifice, he returned to California to direct the closing operations of the firm. It almost seemed as though he had deliberately chosen this hardship in order to restore his damaged self-respect, inasmuch as other competent members of the firm were in a better financial position to make the trip.<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, the situation in California oppressed him. Melancholy, depression, and self-recrimination characterized his letters during this period. He wrote his wife in March, 1858:

It is too bad to oppress your mind with such sad pictures, but you can easily imagine me here, far away from you, far away from the children, with hope almost gone of ever again being able to regain what little self-respect or composure I ever possessed. . . . What I failed to do, and the bad debts that now stare me in the face, must stand forever as a monument of my want of sense and sagacity.<sup>17</sup>

Ellen expressed concern about her husband's low spirits and considered joining him in this difficult endeavor. William would not have her assistance. He wrote his father-in-law

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<sup>16</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 98. The private fortunes of several members of the firm were still intact.

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, March 3, 1858, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 153.

entreating him to convince Ellen to remain at home. She did not understand the duties which he owed his co-partners.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Sherman feared that she understood his obligations more realistically than he, and her presence in California might interfere with his determination to resolve guilt feelings connected with the California misfortunes. In April he appraised his sacrifices--loss of army commission, waste of five years' time, forfeiture of property, "shipwreck at sea as well as at heart."<sup>19</sup> Having sufficiently compensated for his mistakes, Sherman prepared to return home.

Shortly after returning to Lancaster, Sherman joined the law firm of Hugh and Tom Ewing, Jr. in Leavenworth, Kansas. Although his "general intelligence" had sufficed for his licensing in law, he felt uneasy in the profession. Skeptical regarding a successful future in this new career, Sherman revealed to Ellen in October, 1858:

I confess I will feel as an imposter if I should be left alone to counsel, advise and act in a capacity which I am not and which probably I never can become.<sup>20</sup>

Ellen had joined her husband in Kansas, but returned to Lancaster in March, 1859, to have her fifth child. Alone

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<sup>18</sup>See W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, April 2, 1858, Ewing Family Papers: "Of course Ellen is uneasy about me, but you must not let her think of coming out. . . . She fears I will stay here and don't appreciate the duties I owe to co-partners."

<sup>19</sup>Sherman enumerated these sacrifices in a letter to his father-in-law. See W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, April 15, 1858, Ewing Family Papers.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 103.

again, Sherman's despondency returned. He deplored his unsuccessful attempts at establishing a suitable career.

He began to feel worthless and defeated. He wrote his wife:

I am doomed to be a vagabond, and shall no longer struggle against my fate. . . . I look on myself as a dead cock in the pit, not worthy of further notice.<sup>21</sup>

Discontented with his law career, Sherman's thoughts reverted to the Army. He wrote his old friend, Don Carlos Buell, who was now assistant adjutant general, asking if there were any vacancies among army paymasters. Buell had no position to offer, but suggested that Sherman apply for the superintendency of the new military institute about to be opened in Louisiana.

Sherman's application for the position in Louisiana received favorable consideration, and in October, 1859, at the age of thirty-nine, he embarked on his fourth career. As superintendent of Louisiana Military Academy,<sup>22</sup> Sherman was able to utilize both his administrative and his military training. Enthusiastic about this new challenge, Sherman sought living arrangements for his family in New Orleans.

Circumstances soon clouded the advantages of his new career, however. As Sherman assumed his duties in Louisiana, growing antagonisms between the North and South became increasingly apparent. The slavery question had become high-charged. John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry had

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<sup>21</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, April 15, 1859, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 159.

<sup>22</sup>This institution later became Louisiana State University.

provoked irrational feelings in both the North and the South. Southerners looked with suspicion upon persons even remotely associated with abolitionist sentiments. Currently, John Sherman's name had been linked with the feared abolitionist because of his inadvertent endorsement of Helper's Impending Crisis.<sup>23</sup> In the heart of Louisiana's southland, Sherman's position was precarious.

While pondering his situation, he received notification from Thomas Ewing of an attractive offer to manage a branch bank in London, at a salary that would double his income at the Academy. Ellen indicated enthusiasm for the London opportunity, particularly in view of the current uncertainties in the United States. The London offer held every hope for personal happiness, but in spite of his wife's entreaties and his father-in-law's advice, he decided to decline it. He attempted to explain his decision to Ewing:

I see daily marks of confidence in me and reliance upon my executing practical designs, and if I were to say that I contemplated leaving, I would give great uneasiness to those who have built high hopes.<sup>24</sup>

Under the circumstances, such reasoning was unrealistic. Sherman had occupied his new position less than three months, hardly time to have established the Academy's exclusive dependence upon his administrative skill. The limited

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<sup>23</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 117.

<sup>24</sup>W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, January 8, 1860, Ewing Family Papers.

duration of his office, moreover, was becoming more apparent as antagonism between the North and South increased. He had expressed his intention of resigning from the Academy in the event of Louisiana's secession from the Union, and his letters revealed his awareness of the inevitability of a national disaster.<sup>25</sup> His motives for remaining at the Academy were obscure. Perhaps his intimate reflections to his wife were most illustrative of his true feelings:

. . . here I can't do much harm, if I can't do any good and here we have solitude and banishment enough to hide from the misfortunes of the past.<sup>26</sup>

As the tension within the nation mounted, so also did the tension within the man. Food at the Academy was adequate, and the Louisiana climate was beneficial to his asthma, but Sherman suffered steadily from loss of weight. Already a lean individual, he lost fifteen pounds after his arrival at the Academy.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, he became increasingly distressed at the prospects of the dissolution of the Union, and when South Carolina seceded in December, 1860, Sherman was found "pacing the floor, tears falling, his tongue flinging despair."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>See W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, Jr., December 23, 1859, quoted in Fleming, ed., Sherman as College President, p. 89: "I always laughed when I heard disunion talked of, but I now begin to fear it may be attempted."

<sup>26</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, February 13, 1860, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 177.

<sup>27</sup>See Paul E. Steiner, Medical-Military Portraits of Union and Confederate Generals (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 66.

<sup>28</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 137.



This intense reaction to secession presents an interesting paradox. Sherman's attitude toward the government which he hoped to preserve was far from one of unmitigated devotion. In 1844 he had opposed his brother John's entrance into politics:

What in the devil are you doing? Stump speaking!  
I really thought you were too decent for that . . . .<sup>29</sup>

Again, in 1851, he admonished John "to shun politics like poison".<sup>30</sup> In 1852 he told John that he hoped he had been forever cured of politics, suggesting that he "leave the democracy to their power and subsequent defection and downfall".<sup>31</sup>

By June of 1860 Sherman was describing the popular government as too often prey to the prejudices and self-interests of uninformed numbers. He charged John:

. . . . You and all who derive power from the people do not look for pure, unalloyed truth, but to that kind of truth which jumps with the prejudice of the day.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, October 24, 1844, in Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, January 14, 1851, ibid., p. 49.

<sup>31</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, November 17, 1852, ibid.,

<sup>32</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, June, 1860, ibid., p. 84.

He expressed his skepticism of the democratic system to his wife in January, 1861:

This rapid popular change almost makes me a monarchist, and raises the question whether the self interest of one man is not a safer criterion than the wild opinions of ignorant men.<sup>33</sup>

To his superior at the Louisiana Military Academy he had confessed:

This is the real trouble, it is not slavery, it is the democratic spirit which substitutes mere opinions for law.<sup>34</sup>

Sherman's distrust of the democratic processes went beyond mere verbalizations. At the age of forty, he had not yet exercised his privilege of franchise,<sup>35</sup> nor did he choose to vote in the crucial election of 1860.<sup>36</sup>

His criticism of the existing government was candid in the period immediately preceding the outbreak of war. He charged Buchanan's failure to strengthen Major Anderson

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<sup>33</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, January 27, 1861, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 193.

<sup>34</sup>W. T. Sherman to G. Mason Graham, January 5, 1861, in Fleming, ed., Sherman as College President, p. 329.

<sup>35</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 134.

<sup>36</sup>See Fleming, ed., op. cit., p. 304. The question of Sherman's eligibility to vote had been discussed. Examination of residency requirements in Louisiana indicated that Sherman had fulfilled the necessary regulations. He deliberated at length and concluded not to vote in this critical election, nevertheless.

at Fort Moultrie as:

. . . the evidence of contemptible pusillanimity of our general government--almost convincing me that the government is not worth saving.<sup>37</sup>

He repeated his attack on January 8, 1861:

This disgusts me, and I would not serve such a pusillanimous government. It merits dissolution.

In the same letter he indicated his reluctance to participate in the armed conflict which appeared inevitable:

. . . . I see every chance of long, confused and disorganizing Civil War, and I feel no desire to take a hand therein. . . .<sup>38</sup>

He told his brother John on January 16, 1861, that he felt no inclination to take part in the ensuing civil conflict, and expressed similar convictions in his letter of resignation from the Louisiana Military Academy to C. Mason Graham.<sup>39</sup>

Again, his expressions were more than mere rhetoric. To Lincoln's first call for troops, Sherman refused to respond.

Such attitudes represented neither patriotism nor respect. Nor did they account for reduction to tears when

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<sup>37</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, December 18, 1860, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, pp. 186-87.

<sup>38</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, January 8, 1861, ibid., p. 187.

<sup>39</sup>See Fleming, ed., Sherman as College President, p. 339. Both letters are quoted by Fleming. Sherman's letter of resignation said specifically: "I feel no wish to take part in the civil strife that seems inevitable. I would prefer to hide myself. . . ."

the national integrity was threatened. What other factors, then, might explain Sherman's emotional reaction to the breakup of the nation? Could it be that the idea of disintegration in itself was a painful encounter for this security-shattered individual? Having spent a substantial part of his life in the South, did not Sherman face, now, a division of allegiance, reminiscent of earlier trauma?

#### IV. THE CRISIS--NATIONAL AND PERSONAL

Sherman avoided involvement in the war for several weeks, settling in St. Louis as president of a street car company. The motives behind his eventual re-enlistment in the Army are not clear. Possibly he was influenced by his brother John's advice:

By all means take advantage of the present disturbances to get into the army, where you will at once put yourself in a high position for life. . . . I urge you to avail yourself of these favorable circumstances . . . . for, after all, your present employment is of uncertain tenure in these stirring times.<sup>1</sup>

On May 8, 1861, Sherman wrote to Secretary of War Cameron asking for a post commensurate with his training.<sup>2</sup> While awaiting his reply, he composed a letter to an old friend from Louisiana in which he revealed additional motivating factors behind his re-enlistment:

. . . my family and friends are almost cold to me and they feel and say that I have failed at the critical moment of my life. It may be I am but a chip on the

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<sup>1</sup>John Sherman to W. T. Sherman, April 12, 1861, in Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup>W. T. Sherman to Secretary of War Cameron, May 8, 1861, Ewing Family Papers, Special Correspondence.



whirling tide of time destined to be cast on the shore as a worthless weed.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly, thereafter, Sherman received the appointment of Colonel of the Thirteenth Regular Infantry. John Sherman was confident of his brother's favor among the officials in Washington. He wrote William that it would be his "own fault" if he failed to obtain a very high position in the army.<sup>4</sup> To a man already sensitive to his personal failings, these expectations would add an onerous mandate to succeed.

Bull Run failed to provide this opportunity. His disorganized brigade and unfortunate defeat in this first battle seriously distressed Sherman. On July 24, 1861, he confessed to Ellen:

. . . . Well, as I am sufficiently disgraced now, I suppose soon I can sneak into some quiet corner.<sup>5</sup>

Once again, the self-effacement was unwarranted. Sherman's conduct during the battle of Bull Run, in spite of the defeat, received official commendation. As a result of this performance, Lincoln elevated Sherman to the status of Brigadier-General of Volunteers. It was in this capacity

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<sup>3</sup>W. T. Sherman to David Boyd, May 13, 1861, in Fleming, ed., Sherman as College President, p. 381.

<sup>4</sup>John Sherman to W. T. Sherman, May 30, 1861, in Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, p. 117.

<sup>5</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, July 24, 1861, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, pp. 203-4.

that Sherman was sent to assist General Robert Anderson in an expedition to Kentucky. But the new gold star did not significantly restore the shattered self-confidence. Before leaving for Kentucky, the newly commissioned Brigadier sought Lincoln's assurance that he would be spared the responsibility of being first in command.<sup>6</sup> The fear of further failure appeared to underlie the request, for he explained to Ellen in a letter from Fort Corcoran before his removal to Kentucky: "Not till I see daylight ahead do I want to lead . . . ."<sup>7</sup>

But dawn was not to break for Sherman in Kentucky. In fact, Sherman almost approached the sunset of his life during this next period of his career. In Kentucky, he encountered poorly disciplined troops, limited supplies, and rampant sickness. Prospects for success in this assignment were more remote than ever.

Frustrated and oppressed by his disadvantageous position, Sherman began to show recognizable symptoms of severe depression. An oppressive pessimism prompted his

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<sup>6</sup>See W. T. Sherman, Memoirs, I, p. 221. Lincoln was amused at this request, remarking that he ordinarily encountered the opposite demand from his officers, finding it difficult to find commands for all who desired them. Regarding Sherman's desire to avoid responsibility, it is interesting to consider Katz' and Thorpe's observations in People in Distress, p. 217: "A person in distress in civilian life is almost certain to develop more severe symptoms under military conditions. . . ." and such individuals would most likely be "afraid to assume responsibility."

<sup>7</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, undated, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 219.

exaggeration of the forces against him. He judged the entire region of Kentucky as pro-Confederate, at a time when Kentucky was, in fact, exhibiting strong Union sympathies. His estimate of the enemy's threat was so grossly out of proportion to the actual circumstances that his soundness was questioned.<sup>8</sup>

On September 27, 1861, Sherman estimated that Simon Buckner was menacing him with 15,000 men. Reports of the Confederate War Department indicated that Buckner's troops numbered 4,500.<sup>9</sup>

Sherman's anxieties were heightened on October 5 when he received news of Anderson's resignation, leaving him in unanticipated and undesired full command. He charged Lincoln with having betrayed his promise, and begged the War Department to relieve him.<sup>10</sup> His apprehension increased as he waited for a replacement. He sent several telegrams to Lincoln describing the inadequacy of his forces, the prospects

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<sup>8</sup>For a detailed account of Sherman's exaggerations during this period see Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (New York, 1956), I, 380-385.

<sup>9</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 190.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 191. For correspondence during this period see The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, D. C., 1880-1901), Ser. I, Vol. IV, pp. 255-314, which include letters to Lincoln, Cameron, and General Lorenzo Thomas. These are cited in John Bennett Walters, "General William T. Sherman and Total War," Journal of Southern History, XIV (November, 1948), 454.

of defeat, the lack of supplies. One telegram of October 14 told Lincoln:

I have reliable information from Bowling Green that Simon Buckner has over 20,000 men with cars sufficient to move them.<sup>11</sup>

Buckner's report on October 19 revealed the described force to be 9,956.<sup>12</sup>

Sherman lived on the ground floor of the Galt House, a small hotel in the heart of Louisville. Often he paced the corridor outside his rooms for hours. The guests whispered about him, and the gossip was that he was insane.<sup>13</sup> Rumors of his insanity culminated in the press coverage following Sherman's interview in Louisville with Secretary of War Cameron. In the presence of newsmen, Sherman told Cameron that he needed 60,000 men for defense and 200,000 for offense in order to save Kentucky. Cameron's reaction

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<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Incidents of bizarre behavior reinforced these suspicions. R. M. Kelly, a Colonel in the U. S. Volunteers under Sherman, described one such episode involving Sherman's having reprimanded a recruit for being improperly attired. At the time, Sherman stood dressed in full uniform with the exception of a battered stove-pipe hat upon his head. The recruit could not resist calling attention to the incongruity in response to the reprimand. See Battles and Leaders, I, 381. Another story described Sherman's having borrowed a freshly lit cigar with which to light his own and then tossing away the borrowed cigar amidst outbursts of laughter. See W. F. G. Shanks, "Recollections of Sherman," Harpers, XXX (April, 1865), 645. While these anecdotes hardly supply reason for charges of insanity, they do suggest a degree of mental preoccupation.

was summed up in the exclamation: "Great God! Where are they to come from?"<sup>14</sup> Following this interview Cameron glibly referred to Sherman's estimate as "an insane request," which newsmen were quick to seize as an official reflection of Sherman's mental state. Publication of this episode began an extended press attack on the general's mental competence. On October 30 the New York Tribune made broad insinuations concerning Sherman's state of mind. The report cited his "gloomy" overestimate of the enemy's force.<sup>15</sup> In spite of the charges, Sherman reaffirmed his position. On November 6 he wrote to General Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant-General:

Do not conclude as before that I exaggerate the facts. They are as stated and the future looks as dark as possible.

Then, he added: " . . . . It would be better if some more sanguine mind were here."<sup>16</sup> This last remark indicated, perhaps, his personal awareness of his own mental confusion.

Awaiting his replacement, Sherman continued to exaggerate the enemy's forces. He sent word to Thomas to halt his offensive toward Cumberland Gap since the Confederate Zollicoffer was charging with overwhelming

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<sup>14</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 192 and Hart, Sherman, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 195.

<sup>16</sup>W. T. Sherman, Memoirs, I, 258.



force. Official records indicated that Zollicoffer, fearing Thomas' larger army, was seeking reinforcements at that time. Another warning to Thomas charged that Albert Sidney Johnston was marching from Bowling Green with 45,000 men to seize Louisville. This rumor Thomas refused to abide. Facts in this case were to reveal that Johnston had a total force of 12,500 men, many of them unarmed.<sup>17</sup>

Sherman's associates recognized his bizarre behavior and anxious state of mind. The seriousness of his condition warranted an official dispatch to Mr. Ewing requesting that he send Mrs. Sherman to Kentucky to relieve the general "from the pressure of business."<sup>18</sup> Ellen Sherman's subsequent letters contribute a new dimension to an understanding of the personality of General Sherman. Ellen's correspondence apprehensively alluded to evidences of insanity in the Sherman family, suggesting her husband's possible predisposition in this regard.

Having joined her husband in Louisville, Ellen wrote John:

. . . . knowing insanity to be in the family and having seen Cump on the verge of it in California, I assure you

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<sup>17</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 198.

<sup>18</sup>See Ellen Sherman to John Sherman, November 10, 1861, in W. T. Sherman Papers, IX: "On Friday morning I was startled and alarmed by the receipt of a dispatch . . . to Father 'Send Mrs. Sherman and youngest boy down to relieve General Sherman from the pressure of business'."

I was tortured by fear, which has been only in part relieved since I got here . . . .<sup>19</sup>

Ellen added that she was distressed by his "melancholy forebodings", and continued:

I find that he has had little or no sleep or food for some time. His mind is certainly in an unhealthy state. . . . The servant boy who waits on him at table told me this morning 'General Sherman seldom took a meal lately' . . . Even this strange servant expressed great sympathy and concern for him without . . . apprehending what we fear.<sup>20</sup>

Ellen's reference to "what we fear" implied that John, too, was aware of the possibility of Sherman's predisposition to instability. Ellen's appraisal of her husband's needs at this time proved almost prophetic:

If he only had troops enough to gain a victory it would have a good affect on his mind.<sup>21</sup>

On November 15 Sherman's replacement, Don Carlos Buell, arrived in Kentucky. The new commander soon telegraphed McClellan that Sherman's apprehensions were groundless, his fortification unnecessary, and that a good many fewer than 200,000 troops would be satisfactory.<sup>22</sup>

Relief from responsibility did not bring relief from depression. Before leaving for his new post, Sherman

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<sup>19</sup>Ellen Sherman to John Sherman, November 10, 1861, in W. T. Sherman Papers, IX.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 198.

wrote his brother:

. . . . I suppose I have been morose and cross and could I now hide myself in some obscure corner I would do so, for my conviction is that our Government is destroyed and no human power can restore it.<sup>23</sup>

Sherman's transfer placed him under Henry Halleck's command in Missouri. In this new position, Sherman again overrated the enemy's strength. At Sedalia, General Pope repeatedly complained to Halleck about Sherman's gross overestimates. At one point, Pope refused to carry out Sherman's unrealistic measures. Recognizing the seriousness of this situation, Halleck communicated with McClellan on December 2, suggesting that Sherman be granted a temporary release from duty explaining that:

. . . . I am satisfied that General Sherman's physical and mental system is so completely broken by labor and care as to render him for the present entirely unfit for duty. Perhaps a few weeks' rest may restore him. I am satisfied that in his present condition it would be dangerous to give him a command here.<sup>24</sup>

Sherman returned to Lancaster, Ohio, for a twenty day period of rest. The period was far from restorative, however. On December 9, 1861, the New York Times published

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<sup>23</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, November 21, 1861, in Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, p. 135.

<sup>24</sup>Dispatch, W. T. Sherman Papers, IX. Halleck's account of his dilemma with regard to Sherman is presented in Stephen E. Ambrose, Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff (Baton Rouge, 1962), pp. 391, 393.

an article attributing Sherman's removal to his being insane. The western papers repeated the accusation. The Cincinnati Commercial of December 11th headlined:

GENERAL WILLIAM T. SHERMAN INSANE

The article read:

. . . . It appears that he was at the time while commanding in Kentucky, stark mad . . . . He has of course been relieved altogether from command. The harsh criticisms that have been lavished on this gentleman, provoked by his strange conduct, will now give way to feelings of deepest sympathy for him in his great calamity.<sup>25</sup>

The news releases shattered Sherman and his family. Little Tommy Sherman came in one day to announce that a boy had told him that his "Papa was crazy."<sup>26</sup> Sherman worried about the disgrace to which he had subjected his father-in-law. He tried to explain his actions in Kentucky in a lengthy letter on December 12, 1861. He attributed the slanderous accusations to a vicious press attack rather than a real reflection of incompetence on his part.<sup>27</sup>

Sherman also attempted to explain his actions to Halleck. He attributed his conduct in Sedalia to his intimate familiarity with the terrain in Missouri which necessitated the excessive caution, and charged the press

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<sup>25</sup>Clipping, W. T. Sherman Papers, X.

<sup>26</sup>Ellen Sherman to John Sherman, December 12, 1861, W. T. Sherman Papers, X.

<sup>27</sup>W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, December 12, 1861, ibid.

with vengeful intentions in his regard. Ellen also wrote Halleck demanding a full account of Sherman's dismissal and the charges issued against him.

Halleck treated the matter lightly. He reminded Ellen that he also had been subjected to the cruelty of the press and had come to disregard such notices, remarking lightly:

. . . . I will take all that is said against him, if he will take all that is said against me. I am certain to make 50% profit by the exchange.<sup>28</sup>

Halleck agreed that the newspaper attacks were shameless and scandalous but wrote Sherman that he could not agree with him that they "have us in their power to destroy us."<sup>29</sup> In commenting upon his treatment of the whole matter as a joke, Halleck admitted to his own wife that Sherman "certainly acted insane."<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the reassurances, Sherman continued to dwell upon the accusations. The charges haunted him. Thoughts of suicide went through his mind.<sup>31</sup> Ellen objected to her husband's returning to St. Louis after the allotted twenty

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<sup>28</sup>Henry Halleck to Ellen Sherman, December 14, 1861, W. T. Sherman Papers, X.

<sup>29</sup>Henry Halleck to W. T. Sherman, December 18, 1861, ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ambrose, Halleck, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup>See W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, January 4, 1862, W. T. Sherman Papers, X: "I am so sensible now of my disgrace from having exaggerated the force of our enemy in Kentucky, that I do think I should have committed suicide were it not for the children."



days. She described her fears to John Sherman:

. . . . . If there were no kind of insanity hereditary in your family and if his feelings were not already in a morbid state I would feel less concern about him, but as it is I cannot bear to have him go back to St. Louis haunted by the spectre, dreading the effects of it in any apparent insubordination of officers or men. It will endure and fasten upon him that melancholy insanity to which your family is subject.<sup>32</sup>

Against his wife's wishes, Sherman returned to St. Louis when his leave expired. His new assignment at Benton Barracks placed him in charge of new recruits, a position of measurably less responsibility than his former commands.

As Sherman adjusted to his new assignment, his family sought to vindicate his name from the dramatic press charges. Thomas Ewing, convinced by Sherman's explanatory letter, suggested that the General initiate a lawsuit against the press. The suggestion prompted a measure of defensiveness on Sherman's part. He declined his father-in-law's advice, confessing:

. . . . . To begin an action for libel would warrant the searching of records and stirring up matters which I cannot properly explain . . . .<sup>33</sup>

Sherman's depression endured. On January 4, 1862, he wrote John: "I do not think that I can again be entrusted with a

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<sup>32</sup>Ellen Sherman to John Sherman, December 17, 1861, W. T. Sherman Papers, X.

<sup>33</sup>W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, December 24, 1861, Ewing Family Papers.

command." <sup>34</sup> A few days later he repeated: "By giving up command in Kentucky I acknowledged my inability to manage the case."<sup>35</sup>

Ellen Sherman determined to restore her husband's self-confidence and vindicate his name. She demanded that the press retract the slanderous statements. She threatened to cancel her subscription and campaign against the local newspaper unless a defense of Sherman appeared in print. Her endeavors culminated in a lengthy letter to the President, requesting an official endorsement of Sherman's sanity. Ellen's letter to Abraham Lincoln sought to explain Sherman's behavior in Kentucky and Sedalia, and to charge the press with conspiracy. Ellen complained that Sherman's current inferior position under General Halleck tacitly testified to the slander of the news reports. She implored the President in eloquent terms:

. . . as the minister of God, to dispense justice to us-- and as one who has the heart to sympathize as well as to act, I beseech you . . . to release my husband from the suspicions now resting on him.<sup>36</sup>

Mindful of her husband's needs, Ellen repeatedly urged John to use his power as a politician to obtain an effective command for William. It is not inconceivable that

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<sup>34</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, January 4, 1862, W. T. Sherman Papers, X.

<sup>35</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, January 9, 1862, ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ellen Sherman to President Abraham Lincoln, January 10, 1862, ibid.

Ellen's exhortations influenced subsequent events, for the following month Sherman was appointed head of the District of Cairo with headquarters at Paducah, Kentucky, the key to the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers.

The new assignment had a salutary effect. Sherman launched into this responsible command with vigor and enthusiasm. He won Halleck's respect for his accurate military calculations, and General Ulysses Grant's admiration for his sound suggestions. This renewal culminated with Sherman's participation in the victorious campaign at Shiloh in early April. His associates lavished praises upon him. Halleck commended Sherman's actions to the Secretary of War on April 13:

It is the unanimous opinion here that Brig. Gen. W. T. Sherman saved the fortune of the day on the 6th instance, and contributed largely to the glorious victory on the 7th. He was in the thickest of the fight on both days . . . . I respectfully request that he be made a major-general of volunteers.<sup>37</sup>

Secretary of War Stanton announced Sherman's promotion on May 1, 1862. Elated with his recognition, Sherman wrote to Ellen making the paradoxical request that she save all newspaper accounts of this venture: "I know you will read all accounts, cut out paragraphs with my name for Willy's

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<sup>37</sup>General Henry Halleck to Secretary of War Stanton, April 13, 1862, W. T. Sherman Papers, X.

future study."<sup>38</sup> How delicately the pendulum of the press had swung from enemy to friend.

The promotion to major-general seemed more than commensurate with the performance at Shiloh, however. Responsibility for the elevation appeared as much directed toward outside influences as toward excellent achievement. Ellen's correspondence with Washington prior to this announcement was still urging tangible recognition for her husband. Her reaction to the news of promotion prompted a note to John remarking that "Cump's promotion was most handsomely done." She declared further:

I am perfectly satisfied now, since he feels that he is vindicated from the charge of insanity and has made his brother officers feel his worth and most of them, his superiority.<sup>39</sup>

The newly promoted major-general was, himself, suspect of the recognition. In a letter to Ellen, Sherman indicated that his old commission of first lieutenant of artillery had given him more satisfaction, commenting that he felt he had merited that station. He doubted that he had earned this one.<sup>40</sup>

Lloyd Lewis described the actual engineering of the

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<sup>38</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, April 11, 1862, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 223.

<sup>39</sup>Ellen Sherman to John Sherman, May 4, 1862, W. T. Sherman Papers, X.

<sup>40</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, May 26, 1862, in Howe, ed., op. cit., p. 226.

promotion:

In Washington, Tom Ewing, Jr., doing legal work for the Union Pacific Railroad, had joined with Ohio's two Senators, John Sherman and Ben Wade, to secure Cump this honor.<sup>41</sup>

Sherman received the major general's stars with pride, nonetheless, and subsequently was assigned to one of the most important posts in the West, the command at Memphis.

The early part of 1863 witnessed a setback in Sherman's elevated outlook, for a defeat at Chickasaw set him back.<sup>42</sup> The appointment of McClernand to supersede him occasioned another outburst of depression. He judged McClernand's appointment a personal insult, explaining to John:

Mr. Lincoln intended to insult me and the military profession by putting McClernand over me, and I would have quietly folded up my things and gone to St. Louis, only I know in times like these all must submit to insult and infamy.<sup>43</sup>

In January, 1863, he expressed the gloomy notion to his wife: "Indeed do I wish I had been killed long since."<sup>44</sup> Ellen's

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<sup>41</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 233.

<sup>42</sup>For the story of the Chickasaw campaign see Battles and Leaders, III, 466, 475, 484-85. Reports from military critics in the North at this time declared that while Sherman was no longer a "lunatic", he was at any rate, a "bungler". See Edward Robins, W. T. Sherman (Philadelphia, 1905), p. 112.

<sup>43</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, January 25, 1863, in Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, p. 183. Apparently, Sherman considered McClernand a "soldier-politician" and therefore disliked him. See Robins, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>44</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, January 28, 1863, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 237.



letters to John showed a renewed concern for her husband's state of mind. Having received the news of the defeat at Chickasaw, she wrote John: "God help us, but I fear the effect on Cump. Do not desert him. . . ."45

The press resumed its attack, emphasizing Sherman's military failings and "unaccountable" actions. Mindful of his previous injuries, Sherman determined this time to fight rather than succumb to the accusations of the press. His response to these attacks was the arrest of the New York Herald's star war reporter, Thomas W. Knox, with a request for his court-martial as a spy. President Lincoln looked askance at this move, and tried, in vain, to get Grant to revoke Sherman's order.46

In spite of his positive response to the new press attacks, Sherman's distress at the accusations was apparent. He considered resigning from the Army. In fact, he sent several letters to his former business associates in St. Louis seeking civilian employment.47 Repeated pleas from home convinced him of the imprudence of such a move.

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45Quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 262.

46See Hart, Sherman, pp. 172-74.

47See Howe, ed., Home Letters, 239-40, and Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, p. 196.

Shortly, thereafter, the seige of Vicksburg required his participation. The successful culmination of this campaign reversed his disaffection. Hope and optimism pervaded his personal correspondence for the first time since the war began. In July he wrote his wife:

I shall go through heat and dust till the Mississippi is clear, till the large armies of the enemy in this quarter seek a more secure base, and then I will renew hopes of getting a quiet home where we can grow up among the children. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Two days after the fall of Vicksburg Sherman maneuvered a skillful march to Jackson for another Union triumph. By the end of the summer he believed the termination of the war was in sight. Ellen joined her husband in August, bringing with her four of their children. Publications in the press lauded the general's skill. A new commission ranked Sherman Brigadier-General in the regular army, a position he preferred to being head of volunteers. Enjoying the recognition of his professional competence and the companionship of his family, Sherman awaited what he believed to be the imminent cessation of hostilities.

But the end of the war was not immediately forthcoming. In fact, indications were that the Confederacy had called up new conscripts and was undertaking to revive the war effort.<sup>49</sup> Sherman's distress at the prospects of an extended conflict

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<sup>48</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, July 5, 1863, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 270.

<sup>49</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 304.

contributed to a reversal of his attitude toward the war. The essence of the new response was a hardened philosophy of vengeance toward the people of the South whom he judged wholly responsible for initiating the conflict.

The change of attitude coincided with a personal tragedy which Sherman suffered in the fall of 1863. His son and namesake, Willy Sherman, contracted typhoid fever while visiting with his father. In spite of excellent medical attention, the young boy died. Sherman blamed himself for having brought his family to the swampy territory of Mississippi. Shaken by the loss, Sherman resolved to:

. . . try and make poor Willy's memory the cure for the defects which have sullied my character. . . . all that is captious, eccentric and wrong.<sup>50</sup>

A new determination marked Sherman's activities in the closing years of the war. Self-effacement gave way to self-confidence. Mild apprehension reverted to fervent conviction. Obedient submission gave way to a desire for independent command and unprecedented maneuvers. In the twilight of the war Sherman managed to subdue the South with a campaign of destruction waged across the heart of the Confederacy. His measures were extreme; his accomplishments extraordinary.

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<sup>50</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 275.

Many historians have appraised Sherman's decisive knock-out blow as, in fact, a merciful measure designed to spare a doomed South unnecessarily protracted human casualty lists. This judgment, however, is predicated on the idea that the destroying of life represents the ultimate cruelty. Such an appraisal fails to take into account the possibility that the deprivation of the spirit of life, the reduction of the nature of existence to a bare level of subsistence, the abstracting from human life of all the accumulated treasures and proud accomplishments of generations, might, in fact, represent an equal if not an even greater cruelty.

The tentative conclusions of this thesis suggest, instead, the possibility that the relentless campaigns of purposeful destruction which Sherman undertook in the closing years of the war marked a "surfacing" of the latent hostilities within the man and the necessities of military strategy justified their release.

## V. FORWARD MARCH--ABOUT-FACE

By 1864 Sherman's activities presented a marked contrast to his previous conduct in the war. Not the least manifestation of his new philosophy was his attitude toward pillaging. His early military career had shown an abhorrence for this practice, even in cases of necessity. He had described his first brigade as "Goths" or "Vandals" because of their proneness to stealing oats, corn, and apples from the countryside.<sup>1</sup> In 1862 he had posted orders to his men during the advance against Corinth:

. . . . Stealing, robbery and pillage have become so common in this army that it is a disgrace to any civilized people. The demoralizing and disgraceful practice of pillage must cease. . . .<sup>2</sup>

In mid-September, 1862, he had written a letter to the editor of the Memphis Bulletin restating the Congressional Act which made straggling and pillaging military crimes, emphasizing that:

. . . every officer and soldier in my command knows what stress I have laid upon them, and that, so far

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<sup>1</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, July 28, 1861, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 209: "No Goths or Vandals ever had less respect for the lives and property of friends and foes, and henceforth we ought never to hope for any friends in Virginia."

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 239.



as in my power lies, I will punish them to the full extent of the law. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Sherman's men had always received lists of approved "appropriations", which included hay, fodder, and firewood. Farmers received receipts for foodstuffs commandeered with a guarantee of payment by the United States government on proof of loyalty after the war's end. Men were instructed not to disturb fence rails unless no other wood were available. Soldiers were forbidden to enter houses or disturb personal belongings.<sup>4</sup>

During the Vicksburg campaign of 1863 Sherman had informed his division commander:

. . . . War at best is barbarism, but to involve all--children, women, old and helpless--is more than can be justified.<sup>5</sup>

By late summer of 1863, after marching his troops from Jackson back to their camps on the Big Black, Sherman wrote Grant:

The amount of plundering and stealing done by our army makes me ashamed of it. I would quit the service if I could because I fear we are drifting to the worst sort of vandalism.<sup>6</sup>

But these convictions evaporated amidst the heat of the inflamed Sherman of 1864. The first area to experience

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Walters, "General Sherman and Total War," p. 461.

<sup>4</sup>W. T. Sherman, Memoirs, II, 304-5.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 269.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

the effects of Sherman's vigor was Meridian, located one-hundred and fifty miles east of Vicksburg. Between February 14 and February 20, Sherman's army devastated this area. Sherman reported:

For five days 10,000 men worked hard and with a will in that work of destruction, with axes, crowbars, sledges, clawbars, and with fire. . . . Meridian, with its depots, store-houses, arsenals, hospitals, offices, hotels, and cantonments no longer exists.<sup>7</sup>

General Stephen D. Lee, a Confederate commanding officer reported that Sherman had stolen three-hundred wagons, burned 10,000 bales of cotton, and 2,000,000 bushels of corn, estimating the damage at fifty million dollars. Three-fourths of this damage was to private property.<sup>8</sup>

Spring and summer of 1864 found Sherman matched against the Confederate forces of Joseph E. Johnston. As both armies advanced toward Atlanta, Sherman took pride in his accomplishments. Paradoxically, he again called attention to press accounts of his activities, writing his wife:

. . . . I suppose you will have curiosity enough to read everything with Sherman at the top of the page.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>W. T. Sherman to General John A. Rawlins, March 7, 1864, in Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XXXII, Part I, 173-79, quoted in Walters, "General Sherman and Total War," p. 471.

<sup>8</sup>"Sherman's Meridian Expedition," Southern Historical Society Papers, VIII (February, 1880), p. 60.

<sup>9</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, May 22, 1864, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 291.

He described the destruction wrought in the path of his army:

We have devoured the land and our animals eat up the wheat and corn field close. All the people retire before us and desolation is behind. . . . I know the country swarms with thousands who would shoot me, and thank their God they had slain a monster; . . . .<sup>10</sup>

There appeared more pride than remorse in his implication that he was guilty as charged.

In the summer of 1864 Sherman waged an offensive attack on Kenesaw Mountain which resulted in a serious loss of men from his regiment. Military experts have questioned the wisdom of Sherman's decision in this regard. The odds for a favorable Union victory in such an encounter were slight.<sup>11</sup> Sherman's experiences at Kenesaw Mountain, however, revealed further manifestations of his new hardened philosophy in this war. His insensitivity to the loss of

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<sup>10</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, June 26, 1864, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, pp. 297-98.

<sup>11</sup>Clarence Edward Macartney discusses an interesting interpretation of Sherman's offensive attack at Kenesaw in Grant and His Generals (New York, 1953), p. 293. He suggests that Sherman's action was prompted by jealousy of Grant's accomplishments with the Army of the Potomac. Having just read of another successful maneuver of Grant, Sherman wanted to "demonstrate that his army could fight as well as Grant's." Thus, in spite of advice to the contrary, he launched his attack. This explanation is questionable, however. Sherman's attitude toward Grant had always been in favor of assuring a continued friendship; his fondness for the General was marked by respect and admiration. Rather, it would seem that the surprising decision for an offensive maneuver at Kenesaw was but another manifestation of the new aggressive policy adopted by Sherman in the past year.

human life appeared in a letter to Ellen two days after the battle:

. . . . I begin to regard the death and mangling of a couple of thousand men as a small affair, a kind of morning dash . . . .<sup>12</sup>

For several weeks after the battle of Kenesaw Mountain there were no further confrontations between the Union and Confederate forces in Georgia. In late July John B. Hood relieved Johnston of command in that territory. After a series of costly skirmishes with Hood's forces, Sherman approached Atlanta.

Sherman's determination again obscured his previously expressed regard for civilians in wartime. To Thomas Ewing he wrote from outside Atlanta:

I found thousands of citizens actually feeding on our stores on the plea of starvation and other citizens by paying freights were allowed to carry food, wares, and merchandise to all the towns from Nashville to Chattanooga. . . . It was the Gordian knot and I cut it. . . . People may starve, and go without, but an army cannot and do its work.<sup>13</sup>

On September 1 Sherman took the city of Atlanta, winning the acclaim of the President, the press, and the nation for his spectacular accomplishment.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, June 30, 1864, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 299.

<sup>13</sup>W. T. Sherman to Thomas Ewing, August 11, 1864, Ewing Family Papers, Special Correspondence.

<sup>14</sup>Abraham Lincoln wrote to Sherman on September 3, 1864, saying that his conduct during the Atlanta campaign would "render it famous in the annals of war, and have entitled those who have participated therein to the applause and thanks of the nation." See Robins, Sherman, p. 210

Following his victory at Atlanta Sherman recalled momentarily his despondent period of 1861. Elated by his recent success, he expressed a belated gratitude to Halleck on September 4, 1864:

I owe you all I now enjoy of fame, for I had allowed myself in 1861 to sink into a perfect slough of despond, and do believe I would have run away and hid from dangers and complications that surrounded us.<sup>15</sup>

The same self-assurance which allowed him to allude freely to that unfortunate period of his career, prompted a bold decision regarding the conduct of affairs in Atlanta. Having concluded that provisions would not suffice for both his army and the citizens, Sherman decided to evacuate the city and issued an order to this effect. The mayor of Atlanta and several members of the city council protested, claiming that the people of the city could not find shelter elsewhere. Sherman replied: "War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it. . . ."<sup>16</sup> and refused to rescind the measure. The evacuation order provoked an extended written contest between Hood and Sherman. Hood complained:

. . . . Permit me to say that the unprecedented measure you propose, transcends, in studied and ingenious cruelty, all acts ever before brought to my attention in the dark history of war.<sup>17</sup> In the name of God, and humanity, I protest. . . .

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<sup>15</sup>Quoted in Ambrose, Halleck, p. 179.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Robins, Sherman, pp. 219-20.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 217.



Sherman's reply was to the point:

In the name of common sense, I ask you not to appeal to a just God in such a sacrilegious manner. . . . If we must be enemies, let us be men, and fight it out as we propose to do, and not deal in such hypocritical appeals to God and humanity. . . .<sup>18</sup>

Jefferson Davis called the evacuation measure a piece of barbarity only comparable to "Alva's atrocious cruelties to the non-combatant population of the Low Countries."<sup>19</sup>

Having besieged and evacuated Atlanta, Sherman directed his attention toward his next move. He had in mind a march across Georgia to Savannah with the intention of destroying completely the reserves and resources of the heart of the Confederacy. He explained the purpose of the march in a telegraph message to Grant:

. . . the utter destruction of its roads, houses, and people will cripple their military resources. . . . I can make the march and make Georgia howl!<sup>20</sup>

Both Grant and Lincoln questioned the wisdom of such a maneuver. Lincoln was apprehensive. Grant was skeptical. Grant felt that Sherman should concentrate on destroying Hood's forces before departing for the sea. Sherman promised that he would leave General Thomas with enough reinforcements to hold a defensive line against Hood in

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<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Robins, Sherman, pp. 218-19.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>20</sup>W. T. Sherman, Memoirs, II, 152.

Tennessee.<sup>21</sup> At best, Sherman received token acquiescence for this venture from his superiors.

On November 12, 1864, Sherman embarked on his march toward the sea. Fearing a possible revocation of his orders, the General ordered the breaking of telegraph wires before departing from Atlanta.<sup>22</sup>

Sherman's march began amidst dramatic press announcements from Southern newspapers. The Macon Telegraph declared:

. . . . The desolator of our homes, the destroyer of our property, the Attila of the west, seeks sanctuary. His shrine is the sea.<sup>23</sup>

As the march progressed, the same newspaper described the General:

It would seem as if in him all the attributes of man were merged in the enormities of the demon, as if Heaven intended in him to manifest depths of depravity yet untouched by a fallen race. . . . Unsated still in his demoniac vengeance he sweeps over the country like a simoom of destruction.<sup>24</sup>

Although the press accounts were often exaggerated, reports from Sherman's own men attested to extensive pillaging

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<sup>21</sup>Some historians have criticized Sherman for leaving Thomas with the full responsibility for coping with Hood's forces. Such critics believe that Thomas' ultimate victory against Hood in December was more decisive in the termination of the war than Sherman's march, pointing out that the glory of Sherman's march depended upon the absence of any further Confederate armed threat. See, particularly, John C. Ropes, "General Sherman," Atlantic Monthly, LXVIII (August, 1891), 199.

<sup>22</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 433.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 441.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 435.

and foraging during the march. A member of Sherman's brigade described the indulgences of the troops:

Turkey, pork, chicken, beef, yams, honey, became now their daily fare, as well as butter, eggs, pickles, preserves, as they helped themselves to the stores in smokehouses and plantation kitchens.<sup>25</sup>

Sherman excused the excessive expropriation of food. In December, 1864, he wrote his wife:

We have lived sumptuously--turkeys, chicken and sweet potatoes all the way, but the poor women and children will starve. All I could tell them was, if Jeff Davis expects to found an empire on the ruins of the South, he ought to afford to feed the people.<sup>26</sup>

As the people starved, Sherman's army grew fatter. With wagons overflowing with food, soldiers sometimes marched with hams or quarters of fresh pork on their bayonets.<sup>27</sup> Nor was the marauding confined to the confiscation of food alone. Wanton destruction of private homes and property was common. Descriptions of the destructive escapades from eye-witnesses are prolific. Some instances record heartless mutilation of precious family heirlooms and treasured possessions.<sup>28</sup>

One traveller with Sherman recalled that money

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<sup>25</sup>Corydon Edward Foote as related to Oliver Deane Howell, With Sherman to the Sea (New York, 1960), p. 212.

<sup>26</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, December 16, 1864, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 318.

<sup>27</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 455. See, also, John M. Gibson, Those 163 Days (New York, 1961), p. 82.

<sup>28</sup>See Katharine M. Jones, When Sherman Came: Southern Women and the "Great March", (Indianapolis, 1964), pp. 1-108. A variety of letters, diary extracts, and family papers describe the destructive activities of Sherman's men from eye-witness accounts of the women left behind.

was often extracted from private citizens under the threat of the bayonet or the torch. Robbery extended to other valuables as well--plate and silver spoons, silk dresses, elegant toilet articles, pistols. Often pianos were cut to pieces with axes, elegant sofas broken, paintings and engravings pierced with bayonets or slashed with swords.<sup>29</sup>

Although much of the ravishing was attributed to the "bummers,"<sup>30</sup> a good measure of the destruction fell within the bounds of the Official Orders issued at the start of the campaign. Consider the liberal qualifications in that message:

In districts and neighborhoods where the army is unmolested, no destruction of such property should be permitted; but should guerrillas or bushwackers molest our march, or should the inhabitants burn bridges, obstruct roads, or otherwise manifest local hostility, then army commanders should order and enforce a

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<sup>29</sup>See George W. Pepper, "With Sherman," in William B. Hesseltine, ed., The Tragic Conflict (New York, 1962), p. 239.

<sup>30</sup>It is difficult to establish the actual status of the "bummers" who followed Sherman's line of march. Supposedly, the term meant "unauthorized foragers," yet the General himself often spoke with pride of these individuals. Even Lincoln condoned this group. Sherman once described a session with the President held in March, 1865, remarking that "Mr. Lincoln . . . seemed to enjoy the numerous stories about 'our bummers' of which he had heard much." See "Unpublished Letters of General Sherman," North American Review, CLII (March, 1891), 372. At the end of the war Sherman spoke jocularly of himself as "an old bummer." See Lewis, Sherman, p. 454.

devastation more or less relentless, according to the measure of such hostility.<sup>31</sup>

These specifications allowed a considerable latitude of interpretation. Particularly vague was the clause "or otherwise manifest local hostility."

Nonetheless, authorized or unauthorized, the damage to Georgia was extensive. Sherman himself estimated the total amount of destruction at about one-hundred million dollars, reporting that "at least \$20,000,000 of which has inured to our advantage."<sup>32</sup> The remaining \$80,000,000 he described as "simple waste and destruction."<sup>33</sup>

In late December Sherman's men occupied Savannah. Proud of his accomplishments, Sherman telegraphed Lincoln

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<sup>31</sup>Special Field Orders No. 120, issued at Kingston, Georgia, November 9, 1864, in Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XXXIX, Part 3, pp. 713-14; quoted in Walters, "General Sherman and Total War," p. 475.

<sup>32</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 465. See, also, Gibson, 163 Days, p. 113.

<sup>33</sup>It is difficult to account for Sherman's having tolerated this extent of damage to private property. James Ford Rhodes felt that Sherman's pride in the accomplishments of his soldiers caused him to undermine the extent of personal property destruction. See "Sherman's March to the Sea," American Historical Review, VI (April, 1901), 471. See, also, C. C. Jones, Jr., "General Sherman's March from Atlanta to the Coast," Southern Historical Society Papers, XII (July-August-September), 294-309. Many historians hold that Sherman's choice of economic destruction as opposed to human casualties was a merciful decision. For an attack on that view see supra, p. 47.



on December 24, 1864, offering the city to the President as a "Christmas gift". Praise and thanksgiving were returned to the General.

As the year closed, Sherman's self-confidence had exceeded every measure of anticipation. He wrote John on December 31:

I hear the soldiers talk as I ride by--'There goes the old man. All's right.' Not a waver, doubt, or hesitation when I order, and men march to certain death without a murmur if I call on them. . . .<sup>34</sup>

On the same evening he elatedly wrote his wife:

I am now in a magnificent mansion living like a gentleman. . . . I have received from high sources highest praises and yesterday . . . was toasted, etc., with allusions to Hannibal, Caesar, etc., etc. Thus far success has crowned my boldest conceptions and I am going to try others quite as quixotic.<sup>35</sup>

Sherman's ambitions to try others "quite as quixotic" were threatened by Grant's request that he leave his command in Savannah and join the Union forces against Lee in Virginia. After lengthy correspondence with his superior, Sherman finally exacted approval for his plans of extending the destructive campaign through the Carolinas for a final measure of annihilation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, December 31, 1864, in Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, p. 241.

<sup>35</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, December 31, 1864, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, pp. 322-23.

<sup>36</sup>See "General Sherman's Method of Making War," Southern Historical Society Papers, XIII (Jan.-Dec., 1885), 446.

Sherman considered his campaign through the Carolinas a more significant maneuver than the Georgia march. He recorded in his Memoirs:

Were I to express my measure of the relative importance of the march to the sea, or that from Savannah northward, I would place the former at one, and the latter at ten, or the maximum.<sup>37</sup>

Stories of destruction during this campaign matched those of the Georgia venture. An eye-witness described the parallel columns of black smoke arising against the sky marking the roads followed by Sherman's troops as they made their way northward.<sup>38</sup> Sherman's foragers were observed playing snowball along fire-lit streets with precious flour; sending boxes and barrels of crackers afloat on streams of molasses and vinegar; feeding horses from hats full of sugar.<sup>39</sup>

Again, Sherman did little to control the infractions. In fact, he reacted rather violently to Confederate complaints registered against the lawless rampagers along his line of march. The Confederate Commander Hampton had charged:

It is part of the system of the thieves whom you designate as your foragers to fire the dwellings of those citizens whom they have robbed. To check this inhuman system . . . I have directed my men to shoot down all of your men who are caught burning houses.

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<sup>37</sup>II, 221.

<sup>38</sup>See William D. Pickett, "Why General Sherman's Name is Detested," Confederate Veteran, XIV (July, 1906), 297.

<sup>39</sup>See John G. Barrett, Sherman's March Through the Carolinas (Chapel Hill, 1956), p. 96.

This order shall remain in force so long as you disgrace the profession of arms by allowing your men to destroy private dwellings.<sup>40</sup>

Sherman's position was unyielding. Contrary to his previous admission of the illegality of this practice,<sup>41</sup> he now defended foraging as a "war right as old as history." He admitted that foraging was the occasion for "much misbehavior" on the part of his men, but declared that he would not permit "an enemy to judge or punish with wholesale murder."<sup>42</sup> In effect, Sherman denied the enemy the right to resist this hostile invasion.

As Sherman's troops progressed, so did his self-esteem. Late in March, 1865, he wrote Ellen:

Soldiers have a wonderful idea of my knowledge and attach much of our continued success to it . . . . I don't believe anything has tended more to break the pride of the South than my steady persistent progress.<sup>43</sup>

And on April 5, 1865, he wrote:

I continue to receive the highest compliments from all quarters . . . . Indeed, officers from every quarter want to join my 'Great Army'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Quoted in Barrett, Sherman's March, p. 105.

<sup>41</sup>See supra, pp. 48-9.

<sup>42</sup>See Barrett, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>43</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, March 23, 1865, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 335.

<sup>44</sup>W. T. Sherman to Ellen Sherman, April 5, 1865, ibid., p. 338.

His new euphoria actually prompted him to allude in one of his letters during this period to the "grand and beautiful game of war."<sup>45</sup>

But the grand and beautiful game of war was about to end for the triumphant commander. News of Lee's surrender at Appomatox prompted arrangements for peace negotiations in the South. Conferences with Jefferson Davis and Joseph Johnston indicated a willingness to discuss terms of surrender. As representative for the Confederate armies of the South, Johnston agreed to meet with Sherman on April 17 to discuss cessation of hostilities. On the morning of the 17th Sherman received a dispatch informing him of Lincoln's assassination. Filled with the disturbing news of the national tragedy, Sherman set out to meet Johnston near Durham Station in North Carolina. The results of this encounter astonished the nation.

So lenient were the terms of surrender<sup>46</sup> that public reaction ranged from surprise to shock. Secretary of War Stanton denounced the terms and immediately directed Grant to attend to affairs in North Carolina. Halleck

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<sup>45</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 514.

<sup>46</sup>For the explicit terms of surrender as well as a sensitive account of the negotiations, see Joseph E. Johnston, "My Negotiations with General Sherman," North American Review, CXLIII (August, 1886), 183-97.

telegraphed Generals Thomas and Wilson to disregard Sherman's truce and resume hostilities.<sup>47</sup>

The press was among the most vociferous of Sherman's critics. The New York Times facetiously reported:

In reading the provisions of this remarkable compact . . . one is at a loss to know which side agreed to surrender.<sup>48</sup>

The New York Herald declared:

Sherman's splendid military career is ended. He will retire under a cloud . . . . Sherman has fatally blundered for, with a few unlucky strokes of his pen, he has blurred all the triumphs of his sword.<sup>49</sup>

The Chicago Tribune stated:

We cannot account for Sherman's signature on this astounding memorandum, except on the hypothesis of stark insanity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>This action on Halleck's part caused a breach in the long friendship between him and Sherman. Halleck failed to realize how much of an affront Sherman considered this move, however, for the following month Halleck issued Sherman an invitation to stay with him in Richmond on his way to Washington for the grand review of the armies. Sherman flatly refused the invitation, remarking that after Halleck's dispatches during the peace negotiations, "I cannot have any friendly intercourse with you," adding "I prefer we should not meet." See Ambrose, Halleck, p. 201. During the grand review in Washington Sherman had an opportunity to officially "snub" Secretary of War Stanton for his part in the same affair. Sherman refused to shake Stanton's hand when the latter extended it on the public platform. See W. Fletcher Johnson, Life of William Tecumseh Sherman, (n.p., 1891), pp. 445, 580.

<sup>48</sup>April 24, 1865, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 552.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 553.



Not only did Sherman suffer from public disdain, but also from his own family's failure to share his views. Ellen's letter of April 25 expressed sympathetic regard for her husband along with mild disapproval of his actions:

I know your motive was pure. I know you would not allow your army to be in the slightest degree imperiled by this armistice, and, however much I differ from you, I honor and respect you for the heart that could prompt such terms.<sup>51</sup>

John Sherman requested an explanation from his brother, indicating how "sorely troubled" he felt over the affair.<sup>52</sup>

Explanations proffered for Sherman's lenient peace negotiations with Johnston were extensive. John Sherman believed that his brother acted from a fear for his own life following the recent violence in Washington.<sup>53</sup> Less sympathetic views suggested that Sherman had conspired with Jefferson Davis to effect the latter's escape to Mexico

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<sup>51</sup>Ellen Sherman to W. T. Sherman, April 25, 1865, in Howe, ed., Home Letters, p. 348.

<sup>52</sup>John Sherman to W. T. Sherman, May 2, 1865 and May 16, 1865, in Thorndike, ed., Sherman Letters, pp. 248, 251.

<sup>53</sup>See John Sherman, Recollections, I, 355. John described the atmosphere in Washington at that time as charged with terror, caused by the assassination of Lincoln, the wounding of Seward, and the threats against all who were conspicuous in political or military life in the Union cause.

with a confiscated sum of money.<sup>54</sup> Foreign news bulletins charged Sherman with personal ambitions for establishing himself as military dictator of the United States.<sup>55</sup> The most plausible explanation behind Sherman's lenient course of action seemed to be that the General had negotiated in accordance with what he had understood to be Lincoln's intentions when he conferred with the President in March. If such were the case, it is difficult to explain why Sherman made no mention of the late president's influence when he appeared before Wade's Committee on the Conduct of the War on May 22, 1865. Lloyd Lewis recognized this neglect but attributes the omission to a reluctance to dishonor the dead. He explains:

The most likely explanation of Sherman's decision to throw a wall of silence about Lincoln's words lay in his lifelong habit of refusing to throw off on other men. It was his way to shoulder responsibility, and it would have been utterly characteristic for him to have concluded that it would be unmanly to assign to Lincoln the authorship of a course so universally damned by enemies of the dead man.<sup>56</sup>

Again, it seems as though Lewis has oversimplified an action in Sherman's favor. The official board of inquiry

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<sup>54</sup>It was this rumor which had prompted Halleck's telegram, "Pay no attention to the Sherman-Johnston truce . . . try to cut off Jeff Davis' specie," which was sent to Sheridan along with the dispatches to the other commanders in the South. Official Records, Ser. I, SLVI, Part 3, p. 895, quoted in Ambrose, Halleck, p. 199.

<sup>55</sup>London Times, March 4, 1865, quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 553. The memory of Napoleon's coup was hardly fifty years old, and thus likely to affect European judgments.

<sup>56</sup>Lewis, Sherman, p. 569.

deserved a full presentation of the factors surrounding Sherman's decision. Moreover, the vindication of Sherman's own name from slanderous assault required only the presentation of the truth in this regard.<sup>57</sup>

Amidst the variety of explanations offered for Sherman's excessive leniency, it might be well to introduce the possible psychological motivations. Would not such generosity serve to compensate for the excessive cruelties inflicted in the Georgia and Carolina ventures? Might not such compensation palliate some of the guilt connected with the recent relentless destruction? This speculation is not entirely illusory. Indeed, Sherman's exaggerated manifestations of generosity extended beyond the peace negotiations with Johnston.

With the termination of hostilities Sherman allowed many of Johnston's men to retain their muskets as they started home, claiming that they might encounter guerrilla threats and need them for defense. At the same time he ordered his subordinate in Savannah to issue two-hundred and fifty bushels of corn daily to civilians, although the amount endangered the rations of his own men. In mid-June of 1865 he ordered the distribution in Atlanta of forty-five

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<sup>57</sup> An interesting scholarly investigation of this affair is presented by Raoul S. Naroll, "Lincoln and the Sherman Peace Fiasco--Another Fable," Journal of Southern History, XX (November, 1954), pp. 459-83. Mr. Naroll contends that Lewis' evidence is unconvincing and inconclusive, maintaining that Sherman's peace terms were entirely his own creation.

thousand pounds of meal and ten thousand pounds of flour a week. General Thomas recognized the extravagance of this order and reversed Sherman's instructions, remarking that the proportions were "extravagant and too extensive."<sup>58</sup>

In fact, Sherman exhibited this extraordinary trait throughout the remainder of his life. After the war, he maintained charge accounts for penniless veterans at clothing stores and boot shops, in spite of the fact that his own financial position was often precarious.<sup>59</sup> Colonel Edward Bouton recalled visiting Sherman after the war and hearing him say that he "gave one-third of his pay each month to soldiers and charity."<sup>60</sup> A personal friend of Sherman in his later years told of an incident involving the General's having invited him to attend a "Buffalo Bill" performance at the fair grounds. On the way to the show a crippled veteran encountered the pair, prompting Sherman to empty his pockets for the distressed soul and then having

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<sup>58</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 559.

<sup>59</sup>Robert G. Athearn discusses Sherman's discontent with his military stipend after the war. Apparently, although living costs had increased, military salaries had not changed measurably since the Revolution. See William Tecumseh Sherman and the Settlement of the West (Norman, Oklahoma;

<sup>60</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 623.

to borrow admission money.<sup>61</sup>

As the nation struggled to re-establish harmony out of disorder, apparently so also did Sherman.

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<sup>61</sup>See S. H. M. Byers, "Some Personal Recollections of General Sherman," McClure, III (August, 1894), 219.



## VI. VIGOROUS VETERAN

Following the celebrations and official receptions at the war's end, Sherman returned to Lancaster with his family. His new military assignment directed him to the district of the Mississippi, with headquarters in St. Louis. In spite of an expressed desire to settle down with his family, the man could not resist the appeal of an adventurous assignment. In 1869 he chose to supervise the construction of the trans-continental railroads involving the control of Indian threats in the West.<sup>1</sup>

After Grant's election to the presidency, however, Sherman accepted the position as head of the Army, necessitating his removal to Washington. Uneasy amidst the political pressures of the nation's capital, it was with enthusiasm that General Sherman received an opportunity to travel to Europe in the fall of 1871. He embarked on this trip, ironically, the very day of his father-in-law's funeral,<sup>2</sup> hastening from the ceremonies to the steamship.

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<sup>1</sup>For a complete account of Sherman's experiences in the immediate post-war years see Athearn, Sherman and the Settlement of the West.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Ewing died at the age of eighty-two after an illness of two years. See Lewis, Sherman, p. 609.

Europe hailed Sherman as a hero and military genius. The General enjoyed the lavish receptions prepared in his honor throughout the continent.<sup>3</sup> Refreshed and invigorated from his European tour, Sherman resumed his former assignment in Washington. Two years after his return, he transferred his headquarters to St. Louis, happily departing from what he considered a corrupt political atmosphere.<sup>4</sup>

In St. Louis, Sherman completed his Memoirs, a work which he hoped would present a more accurate account of his career than the biased statements of professional reporters.<sup>5</sup> Eighteen of the original twenty-four chapters of the Memoirs were devoted to the war years.

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<sup>3</sup>See "Diary Extracts" of his European tour, all of which relate the enthusiastic response which he received and the lavish receptions held in his honor, in Century, LVII (March, 1899), 729-40; (April, 1899), 866-75; and LVIII (June, 1899), 278-87. See also Byers, "Recollections," p. 219, for Sherman's reception in Switzerland and Paris. Byers, at that time was Consul at Zurich and received Sherman during his visit there.

<sup>4</sup>See Athearn, Sherman and the Settlement of the West, p. 263.

<sup>5</sup>See Murat Halstead, "Recollections and Letters of General Sherman," Independent, LI (June 22, 1899), 1683. Halstead had been editor of the Cincinnati Commercial in 1861 and had, among others, published the "insanity" bulletins. Sherman wrote Halstead explaining that he aimed to clarify the press coverage of his alleged insanity at that time, and that his Memoirs were intended "to leave . . . a fair, frank account of the matters of public interest with which for good or evil I was associated."

The publication of the Memoirs brought diverse reactions. Some reviews cited Sherman's failure to allow his associates due credit for their accomplishments in the conduct of the war. H. V. Boynton, the most severe critic of the Memoirs, felt that Sherman was "intensely egotistical, unreliable and cruelly unjust to nearly all his distinguished associates."<sup>6</sup> Other reviews applauded the accuracy of the Memoirs, comparing Sherman's accounts against the Official War Records. On the whole, however, the publication of the Memoirs aroused the indignation of the South. Oppressed by the reconstruction policies of the Radical Republicans, the South did not enjoy recalling Sherman's personal pride in their annihilation.

Favorable reception of the Memoirs in the North, however, prompted an enthusiasm for William Tecumseh Sherman for President in the latter part of 1875. Sherman was able to suppress all efforts in this regard indicating his abhorrence for politics, and particularly for the presidential office.<sup>7</sup> By 1884, however, a new vigor for his candidacy

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<sup>6</sup>See "Boynton's Review of Sherman," The Nation, XXI (November 25, 1875), 342.

<sup>7</sup>This was not the first time Sherman's name had been suggested for the presidential office. After the glorious Atlanta campaign, the rumor appeared and prompted the candid remark from Sherman: "If forced to choose between the penitentiary and the White House for four years . . . I would say the penitentiary, thank you." See Lewis, Sherman, p. 411.

arose. On June 3, 1884, Sherman received a telegram to this effect:

Your name is the only one we can agree upon, you will have to put aside your prejudices and accept the Presidency.<sup>8</sup>

Sherman's refusal was classic:

I will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected.<sup>9</sup>

His firmness in refusing the presidential nomination appeared to have developed from a variety of factors. His distrust of politics was probably foremost. In addition, he recalled the unfortunate careers of former military men who had entered politics. He was quoted as saying at one time:

I don't want the Presidency and will not have it. I recall too well the experiences of Jackson, Harrison, Taylor, Grant, Hayes, Garfield--all soldiers--to be tempted by the siren voice of flattery.<sup>10</sup>

Other reasons for refusing the presidential candidacy were more elusive. Consider the following judgment:

. . . I would account myself a fool, a madman, an ass, to embark anew, at sixty-five years of age, in a career that may, at any moment, become tempest tossed . . . .<sup>11</sup>

Desire for job security at twenty-two seemed unrealistic; at sixty-five, it was ludicrous.

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<sup>8</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 631.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>See Byers, "Recollections," p. 222.

<sup>11</sup>W. T. Sherman to J. G. Blaine, May 28, 1884, quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 631.

Not least among his apprehensions was the President's vulnerability to vilification by the press. Although facetiously expressed, the concept is reminiscent of earlier disdain:

. . . if I ran for President I'd wake up some morning and find all over the newspapers that I'd poisoned my grandmother.

Now you know I never saw my mother's mother, but the newspapers would say I killed her and prove it.<sup>12</sup>

A curious insight into his refusal of the presidential candidacy of 1884 was presented in a letter to Senator J. R. Doolittle of Wisconsin, one of his strongest supporters. In a letter to the senator on June 10, Sherman explained that his forced retirement from the Army indicated a degree of incompetence on his part, and, if he were unfit for that governmental service, how could he be judged capable of filling the highest office in the land. He added that he felt that he wished to withdraw from public service

. . . before I could be subjected to the hints and flings that Sherman, naturally eccentric, was becoming old and obstructive. If too old to command an army of twenty-five thousand men, of course I was too old to be President and commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy of the United States.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>W. T. Sherman to Philemon Ewing, quoted in Lewis, Sherman, p. 631.

<sup>13</sup>"Why General Sherman Declined the Nomination in 1884," North American Review, CLXXI (August, 1900), 243-44. In this communication it is difficult to distinguish between Sherman's bitterness at his forced retirement from the Army and his reluctance for political involvement.



Having avoided the political scene, Sherman chose to spend his remaining years enjoying reminiscences of former days of glory. He delighted in allusions to his illustrious career.<sup>14</sup> All of his homes after the war had a basement study, the entrance to which carried a large and emphatic sign: "Office of General Sherman".<sup>15</sup>

Since his retirement from the Army in 1883, Sherman spent the bulk of his time speaking to various groups throughout the country. Although he thrived on the popular attention, he characteristically bemoaned the time spent away from his family. He replied to the secretary of a county fair at Rockford, Illinois, who had sought his presence there:

. . . . I have a family of six children and seven grandchildren. Now the question is, Shall I abandon them, take to the road and consume all my time . . .<sup>16</sup>

He could have refused this and other requests, but he did not. Often he received no remuneration for these engagements. His continued need for recognition appeared to outweigh his preference for home, however, and in the 1880's he was averaging four dinners per week. He attended parties,

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<sup>14</sup>A typical anecdote in this regard tells of a time when Sherman's nephew visited and remarked that he guessed his uncle was the greatest general that ever lived. Whereupon Sherman summoned his wife and made the boy repeat the story. See Lewis, Sherman, p. 625.

<sup>15</sup>See Byers, "Recollections," p. 220.

<sup>16</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 632.

weddings, reunions of soldiers, and public meetings.<sup>17</sup>

With the advance of time, his nostalgia for the Army increased. His addresses to veteran groups often expressed a most intimate affection. On August 11, 1880, he declared to five thousand veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic:

. . . . We are to each other all in all as man and wife, and every soldier here today knows that Uncle Billy loves him as his own flesh and blood.<sup>18</sup>

At the age of seventy he addressed the Society of the Army of the Tennessee in Cincinnati. His admiration for the military man was almost poetic:

. . . . Now, my friends, there is nothing in life more beautiful than the soldier. A knight errant with steel casque, lance in hand, has always commanded the admiration of men and women. The modern soldier is his legitimate successor . . . .<sup>19</sup>

These undisguised expressions of admiration, gratitude, and respect toward the military marked a sharp contrast to the attitudes of the young West Point cadet of the 1830's. It almost seemed that the Army had provided for Sherman what the Sherman-Ewing tutelage lacked--the opportunity for self-realization. In fulfilling this need,

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<sup>17</sup>See John Sherman, Recollections, II, 1101. See, also, Murat Halstead, "Recollections," p. 1685. Halstead recalled that in New York Sherman ranked among the best half dozen after dinner speakers in the 1880's--in a class with Ingersoll, Depew, and Porter.

<sup>18</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 636. This is the speech which also contained the famous "War is Hell" allusion.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 647.

it was the Army, then, that had usurped the real adoptive role.

The closing years of Sherman's life found the elderly gentleman in robust health both physical and mental. Continued demands for his public appearances kept his spirits high. He had many friends and seemed to enjoy pleasant conversation and informal gatherings as much as public affairs.<sup>20</sup>

There was only one recurrence of severe depression in Sherman after the war, and that followed the death of his devoted wife, Ellen, on November 28, 1888. His children recalled that immediately after Ellen's death Sherman lost all interest in his own physical welfare as well as outside affairs. On one occasion he was discovered sitting motionless in his office inhaling poisonous gas from a jet that "a gust of air had extinguished."<sup>21</sup> There was no mention of attempted suicide, but an episode of that nature would invite that suspicion. The melancholy lasted less than a month, however. The thoughtful concern and faithful attendance of his children contributed much to reviving his lost spirits. He resumed his former activities, and before long was maintaining as active a schedule of speaking engagements as ever.

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<sup>20</sup>See Byers, "Recollections," p. 220. Byers recalled: "Sometimes those hot summer evenings on Fifteenth Street, he held quasi-receptions out in front of the house, so many people came to see him. . . . if he saw friends passing under the gaslight, he bade them sit down and chat."

<sup>21</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 646.

In February, 1891, Sherman was taken ill following exposure to the excessive cold on his way to a speaking engagement in New York. The seriousness of his condition increased rapidly. His family was summoned to his bedside for his final hours. Before he died, he received the last rites of the Roman Catholic Church, the faith embraced by his late wife and children. Many judged this event the final irony of his life, suggesting that his infirmities had clouded his judgment. The New York Times charged that a priest had taken advantage of John Sherman's temporary absence from the room and administered the rites to an unconscious man.<sup>22</sup>

This study of the inner dispositions of Sherman could not conclude without giving some attention to this final act of the man's life. Re-examination of the circumstances tends to challenge the accepted judgment of Sherman's reluctant reception of the Catholic sacrament. In 1875 Sherman had explained his unwillingness to join the Catholic Church:

I am not a Catholic and could not be because they exact a blind obedience and subordination that is entirely foreign to my nature.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>February 13, 1891. John Sherman denied that he would have objected to the ritual, however, and issued a statement to the newspapers subsequently. See Recollections, II, 1102.

<sup>23</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 621.

Yet, in reality, how foreign to his nature were the concepts of "blind obedience" and "subordination"? Were these not the principles of the military? Were these not the characteristics which he attributed to a stable government? He had written in 1860:

The law is or should be our king; we should obey it, not because it meets our approval but because it is the law.<sup>24</sup>

He had written Halleck in 1863:

. . . . Obediance to law, absolute--yea, even abject--is the lesson that this war, under Providence, will teach.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the reception of the Roman Catholic rites in his final hours acknowledged the self-discovery of the man.<sup>26</sup>

General Sherman died on February 14, 1891. He had written his own epitaph:

William Tecumseh Sherman. General. United States Army. Born at Lancaster, Ohio. February 8, 1820. Died at ---. Faithful and Honorable.<sup>27</sup>

He wanted to be remembered as a military hero. He was proud of his association with the United States Army. Sherman's performance during the American Civil War, indeed, has

<sup>24</sup>See Lewis, Sherman, p. 134.

<sup>25</sup>W. T. Sherman to Gen. Henry Halleck, September 17, 1863, W. T. Sherman Papers, XIII.

<sup>26</sup>Sherman had met with Father Taylor of the Roman Catholic Church just one week prior to his death during which time they discussed the various teachings of the Church. See Lewis, Sherman, p. 651.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 649.



ranked him among the outstanding figures in American history. Yet, one wonders where he faced the greater conflict--the War between the States or the war within the man?

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